

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now return to legislative session.

The Senator from West Virginia is recognized.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, does the Senator from Kentucky want to be recognized?

Mr. MCCONNELL. Yes. If I could get in the queue here, I know the Senator from West Virginia is going to speak, followed by the Senator from North Carolina.

I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized after the Senator from North Carolina.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I voted against the Frist-Daschle resolution on the Middle East. My constituents are entitled to an explanation. I opposed the resolution, and I know the leaders, and indeed all of the Members of this body, are genuinely committed to advancing the cause of peace in the Middle East, but no one should be naive enough to think this resolution will move the process forward one centimeter. If anything, the lopsided pro-Israel slant of this resolution will serve only to strengthen the growing distrust of moderate Arab States toward the United States.

This resolution is a blatantly unfair reading of the current status of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. It claims that the President's roadmap for peace is still relevant, even though it has been completely stalled for more than a year. The resolution wholeheartedly endorses Prime Minister Sharon's view of the barrier wall being built in West Bank, without so much as a mention of the wide opposition to its construction from moderate Arab countries, such as Jordan.

The resolution contains language that could easily be construed to be in support of the controversial, and some claim illegal, practice of the targeted assassinations carried out by the Israeli Armed Forces. The United States is completely right to condemn the violence carried out by Palestinian terrorists, but we cannot turn a blind eye to the unwarranted excesses of the Israeli Government under Mr. Sharon. If our country truly wants to push both sides toward the negotiating table, we should condemn all violence arising from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including that which has claimed the lives of innocent Palestinians. There is blame to be shouldered by both sides. If we are to regain our credibility—let me say that again. If we are to regain our credibility as honest brokers in the Middle East, we need to acknowledge that fact. Progress will only be made in resolving the Middle East violence when the United States weighs in with a fair, evenhanded position that points out the wrongdoings of both sides.

Resolutions such as this one are a far cry from being fair, objective, or evenhanded.

Besides the specific provisions of this resolution, I oppose the thrust of the resolution, which is intended to express "the Sense of the Congress in Support of United States Policy for a Middle East Peace Process." The United States has been completely disengaged from the Israeli-Palestinian peace process for far too long, and the number of victims on both sides is growing far too fast. I cannot support a policy that boils down to a benign neglect of the violence in the Middle East.

Resolutions such as the one the Senate has taken up today may serve as a useful platform for a press release or a stump speech, but they do nothing to advance the cause of peace in the Middle East. I would jump at the chance to vote for a meaningful resolution that articulated the Senate's support of a viable policy to resolve the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis. But this administration has abandoned any pretense of promoting such a policy. To voice the Senate's support for what amounts to a set of empty promises and incendiary rhetoric is a foolish exercise of which I want no part.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

IRAQ AND AL-QAIDA

Mrs. DOLE. Mr. President, I find it troubling that the war in Iraq is not being equated to the overall war on terror. Polls have shown evidence that Americans are not making the connection. So the question at hand is, Was removing Saddam's government a positive step in the overall war on terror?

Our ability to turn over control to a peaceful and sovereign Iraqi government is an integral part of the overall war on terror. Collaboration of Iraq's former regime with terrorist groups and its funding of them have not been in question. Yet few critics and naysayers have passed up the chance to undermine a link between Iraq and al-Qaida.

Despite recent media reports that have clouded, or even misrepresented, the facts, there is compelling evidence that al-Qaida and Iraq have been linked for more than a decade. Democratic co-chairman of the 9/11 Commission, former Representative Lee Hamilton of Indiana, told reporters there were connections between al-Qaida and Saddam Hussein's government.

In a speech earlier this afternoon, former Vice President Al Gore accused President Bush of lying about a connection between al-Qaida and Iraq. This is the same Al Gore who was a member of the same Clinton White House that first made charges about the dangers of Iraq passing chemical or biological weapons to al-Qaida. Those charges formed the basis for the missile strikes against alleged terrorist targets in Sudan in August 1998, ac-

cording to on-the-record statements from no fewer than six top Clinton administration officials.

Documents discovered recently by U.S. forces at Saddam's hometown of Tikrit showed that Iraq gave Abdul Rahman Yasin both a home and a salary. Yasin was a member of the al-Qaida cell that detonated the 1993 World Trade Center bomb. Is this not a clear example of Iraq not only having a relationship with al-Qaida but also harboring and rewarding a terrorist, a person who was directly involved in a terrorist attack on our soil?

Let me highlight the case of Zarqawi, arguably the most dangerous terrorist in the world today. He and his men trained and fought with al-Qaida for years. Zarqawi's network helped establish and operate an explosives and poison facility in northeast Iraq. Not only was Zarqawi in Baghdad prior to Saddam's ousting, but nearly two dozen members of al-Qaida were there as well. One al-Qaida associate even described the situation in Iraq as good and stated that Baghdad could be transited quickly.

Let me be clear. Mistakes have been made in Iraq, and this operation has been far from perfect, as evidenced by the fact that Zarqawi and other terrorists continue to wreak havoc throughout Iraq. But those who undermine the rationale for our mission in Iraq for political gain make our mission even more difficult and certainly do not boost the morale of our men and women in uniform.

Many of these young men and women are from my home State of North Carolina. They seek to assist the Iraqi people in transforming a country that harbored and gave safe haven to terrorists, a country to which terrorists traveled to consort with one another about how to produce weapons and how to inflict them on a common enemy. The terrorists know what is at stake, which is why they are pulling out all the stops to derail our efforts. They understand that a free and democratic Iraq is a serious blow to their interests.

I want our men and women in uniform to know that this Senator understands and appreciates the importance and the magnitude of the great work they are doing in Iraq. As my colleague, Senator LIEBERMAN, stated very succinctly this morning, the war in Iraq is the central battleground in the war on terror. Because of the efforts and eventual success of many brave men and women, the American people and the world are much safer.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from Kentucky is recognized.

RENEWAL OF SANCTIONS AGAINST BURMA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, a few moments ago, the Senate voted to renew sanctions against one of the worst regimes in the world, the regime